

TESTIMONY ON HCR 28 FOR HOUSE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
December 6, 2016

Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Committee,

My name is Paula Frantz. I speak against House Concurrent Resolution No. 28. I oppose the resolution because it asks Congress to stop refugees from being able to come to the United States while our country reviews and changes the vetting process. Review and modification can be done without refusing to accept people who are fleeing from persecution and tremendous danger.

The first refugees I ever met were a woman and her children from Afghanistan. At the time, I was teaching ESL when this family joined my class in the summer of 2002. The mother didn't speak any English and her children spoke very little. That summer, we spent every day together, not only learning English, but learning about one another. Their story was heartbreaking, like the stories of many refugees. Despite everything they had been through and everything they left behind, they came to class every day with a smile on their face and such gratitude for a new start. I fondly remember taking them sledding for the first time and seeing the pure joy on their faces. The children were finally able to laugh and were free to be children. They had experienced things in their young lives most adults can't even begin to fathom. I learned so much from them that summer; I'm sure more than they learned from me.

It was that initial experience that led me to continue working and volunteering with refugees in the years to follow. For over five years now, I have been the director of the Global Institute of Lansing, where we help adult refugees in the Lansing area earn a high school diploma. My work as the director is all volunteer; giving twenty to thirty hours each week. Our teachers are all volunteers, too. We are all there every day because we believe in our refugee students and believe in their contribution to our community. Our students come from twenty-one different countries. It is this diversity that makes our program so unique and so special. Each one comes with a different story, however, they come with the same goal of peace. Our community is better because they are here and I want them to know they are welcomed here. Each day that I walk into our classroom, I am reenergized by their presence. They work so hard and are determined to graduate so they can go on to college or more gainful employment. They have dreams of buying their first house and making Lansing their permanent home. They are the definition of perseverance. They want to give back to the community that welcomed them with open hearts. I know each one of them will do great things in life and I am a better person because of them.

Two weeks ago, we celebrated a Thanksgiving lunch that was prepared by all our volunteers. For many of our students, this was their first Thanksgiving in the United States. My students expressed their gratitude and hopes for the future with such inspiring words. It was an amazing afternoon. My students are more than just students though; they are like family. One of the greatest joys for me is taking my own children to our classroom so they can spend time with my refugee students. They have formed such a special bond with many of them. However, many of my students have been separated from their own children and I can see the pain in their eyes as they yearn to be with them once again. As a parent myself, I can't even begin to imagine the sacrifice so many of them have made. And for this, I want our community and state to continue to be welcoming to refugees.

I urge you not to move HCR 28 forward and would be pleased to answer any questions.